



July 31, 2009

Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director
Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue, NW · Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431

Dear Gene,

I appreciate the opportunity to review the common core college and career readiness standards presented by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and National Governors Association (NGA). Following a review of the draft standards, I am pleased to offer the continued support of the District of Columbia's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). The committee's efforts to move towards fewer, clearer, and higher standards that are researched based and internationally benchmarked is well evidenced in these draft documents. Furthermore, these proposed standards are well aligned with the current standards and the educational goals of the District of Columbia.

While waiting for the public release of these standards, I convened a working group of content specialists at the OSSE. As a whole, the group was very enthusiastic about the robust standards in math and English language arts. Specifically, we found that the English language arts standards are appropriately broken into three strands and that those strands are reinforced by useful applications. The District of Columbia (DC) has some work ahead as it moves from a curriculum approach on literary texts to one that is more inclusive of informational text—a shift that the OSSE supports and will help drive. DC is committed to academic standards that help students develop stronger analytical skills and are essential to be competitive in the global marketplace.

During the review we also identified that there is no creative writing / imaginative thinking standard. While we recognize that this can be incorporated in the proposed strands, I would be interested in the reasoning or impetus for forgoing this component.

Lastly, the OSSE working group recommends that the media standard: "listen to complex information and understand what was said, identifying main ideas and supporting details" (found in the second to last bullet on page 4B) should be included in the speaking and listening strand of the research application. This would improve the interface between oral and aural research skills.

The math standards represent a more profound shift from the current DC standards as they suggest a conceptual shift from algorithmic fluency to conceptual understanding. The OSSE working group supports this shift as it leads to a deeper understanding of concepts which are crucial building blocks for higher level mathematics. Still, the District of Columbia intends to maintain its robust graduation requirements which require four courses in mathematics to include courses such as Algebra II, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, and Statistics. I also have attached a document with track changes to the draft math standards for your consideration.

It is imperative to note that to ensure an effective transition to the common core English language arts and mathematics standards, the state will require an investment in significant and ongoing professional development for teachers. As the standards are finalized the District will begin to think through an action plan to provide this support for teachers to guarantee successful implementation. We hope that CCSSO and NGA will help the states by disseminating strategies and best practices around the necessary professional development

I would like to reiterate that the proposed college readiness standards represent a large step in the right direction for the students of the District of Columbia. Higher and fewer standards should result in great cost savings for states, greater transparency for schools, and greater achievements for students-- and I am proud to be part of this effort. Thank you for your hard work and commitment to higher standards for all kids.

I look forward to seeing the final college readiness standards and the kindergarten through twelfth grade standards that will follow shortly thereafter. I am eager to share them with the DC community. The District's educational stakeholders will provide valuable feedback and ultimately ensure a successful implementation. If you have any questions or concerns regarding our initial feedback please feel free to contact Adam Thibault, my Deputy Chief of Staff, at adam.thibault@dc.gov.

Regards,

Kerri L. Briggs, PhD.

State Superintendent of Education

Enclosure

CC: Deputy Mayor Reinoso